



### **Convention of the Workingmen's Party of the United States (WPUS)**

In 1874 the Social Democratic Workingmen's Party was organized. This group was centered in New York and consisted largely of German immigrants who were dissidents from the First International. On the volition of this group, which claimed a membership of 1500, a preliminary conference was held in April of 1876 in Pittsburgh, PA, to establish the groundwork for a Congress uniting the Social Democratic Workingmens

Party with adherents of the International Association and other fledgling groups. This April 1876 Pittsburgh gathering issued a call for a Unity Congress to meet in Philadelphia the following July to form a new organization.

#### **1. "Unity Congress"—Newark, NJ—July 19-22, 1876**

On July 19, 1877, this Unity Congress met in a session attended by just 7 delegates, who claimed to represent three thousand organized socialists —635 from the recently-disbanded International, 593 from the Workingmen's Party of Illinois, 250 from the Social Political Workingmen's Society of Cincinnati, and 1,500 from the Social Democratic Workingmen's Party of North America. Philip Van Patten, a Lassallean, was elected the group's first Corresponding Secretary. The Marxists and the Lassalleans coexisted uneasily in this organization, the Marxists winning a party prohibition against the organization participating in electoral politics, a measure largely offset by a contrary policy that permitted participation in local elections if the conditions seemed promising. The new organization, initially called the Workingmen's Party of the US (WPUS), began with three party papers, the official *Arbeiterstimme* (German) from New York, and two "semi-official" weekly newspapers, *The Socialist* (English) from Detroit and *Vorbote* (German) from Chicago.

### **Conventions of the Socialist Labor Party**

#### **1. "National Congress of the Workingmen's Party"—Newark, NJ—Dec. 26 - 31, 1877**

The National Convention of the Workingmen's Party of the United States, assembled in Newark, New Jersey on December 26, 1877, officially changed the name of the WPUS to the "Socialist Labor Party." Even though the 1877 convention was the group's second national gathering, in the official reckoning it is numbered as the "First." Philip Van Patten was retained as National Corresponding Secretary of the organization and John Ehmann, also of Cincinnati, served as National Financial Secretary. While the group's national office was in Cincinnati, a Board of Supervision,

charged with the mediation of complaints, was established in Newark, NJ. The so-called “First Convention” removed the prohibition against electoral participation. Some of the group’s anti-electoral Marxists left the organization in the aftermath of this gathering, forming the International Labor Union (ILU) and taking with them the party’s English language weekly and changing that publication’s name to *The Labor Standard*.

Apamphlet summarizing this gathering was subsequently published entitled *Socialistic Labor Party: Platform, Constitution, and Resolutions Adopted at the National Congress of the Workingmen’s Party of the United States Held at Newark, New Jersey, December 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 1877: Together with a Condensed Report of the Convention Proceedings*. (Cincinnati, OH: Ohio Volks-zeitung, 1878).

In 1878, the *New Yorker Volkszeitung* was established, a publication which ultimately proved to be one of the longest lived in the history of American radical publishing. The paper was initially edited by Dr. Adolph Douai and Alexander Jonas.

## **1877 Resolution, Constitution and Platform of the Socialistic Labor Party**

### **1877 Platform of the Socialistic Labor Party**

#### **2. “2nd National Convention”—Allegheny City, PA -- Dec. 26, 1879 - Jan. 1, 1880**

There was considerable discussion within the radical movement of this period over the question of tactics, with a growing tendency among German immigrants in particular to organize armed “Educational and Defensive” societies called “Lehr und Wehr Verein.” The anglo-phonic Van Patten and his supporters were adamantly against such tactics; they were challenged in this by the SLP’s left, headed by Albert R. Parsons, later of Haymarket Affair fame. Van Patten won the day at the 2nd National Convention, being re-elected as National Corresponding Secretary and seeing the party go on record as favoring participation in the 1880 Presidential campaign.

Apamphlet summarizing this gathering was subsequently published entitled *Report of the Proceedings of the National Convention of the Socialistic Labor Party, Allegheny City, Pa., Dec. 26-Jan. 1, 1879-1880*.

In November 1880, a number of members from the New York sections of the SLP left the organization to form a Revolutionary Club, which adopted a program modeled upon the German Gotha Program. similar revolutionary clubs sprang up in Boston, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, and Chicago. This split of the SLP Left was made formal in October of 1881, when a national convention of revolutionary clubs was held in Chicago and the “Revolutionary Socialist Labor Party” was organized by them.

#### **3. “3rd National Convention”—New York, NY—Dec. XX-XX, 1881**

The 3rd National Convention of the SLP was attended by about 20 delegates,

representing 17 sections. Nearly all of these participants hailed from the Greater New York area. According to Morris Hillquit, “nobusiness of importance was transacted, and the national secretary regretfully stated that the majority of the socialists in the United States were outside the party.” (fn. Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States*, pg. 229). Philip Van Patten was once again re-elected as National Corresponding Secretary of the SLP. Van Patten continued in this role until April 22, 1883, when he suddenly disappeared, leaving a letter announcing his decision to commit suicide. This proved to be a subterfuge, however, and it later developed that Van Patten was discovered working in the lucrative employ of the Federal Government.

Philip Van Patten was succeeded by Jakob Schneider, who was in turn supplanted on a temporary basis in June 1883 by Emil Kreis before the job was taken over in October by Hugo Vogt.

#### **4. “4th National Convention”—Baltimore, MD—Dec. 26 - 28, 1883**

The 4th National Convention was attended by just 16 delegates. This gathering began the process of shifting the organization’s orientation towards electoral politics towards a more trade unionist perspective. The office of National Corresponding Secretary was abolished by the 4th Convention, not being revived until the 5th.

The seat of the SLP’s National Council was moved to New York City in 1884.

"The two years between 1884 and 1886 constituted a drab yet on the whole recuperative period for the Socialistic Labor Party. the depression that began in 1883 had the usual effect of sending new members into the party, and though still dwarfed by the [Anarchist movement], it tripled its membership and doubled the number of its sections." (fn. Quint: *The Forging of American Socialism*, pg. 25).

#### **5. “5th National Convention”—Cincinnati, OH—Oct. 5 - 8, 1885**

The 5th National Convention was held in Schäpperle’s Hall in Cincinnati and was called to order on Monday, Oct. 5 by W.L. Rosenberg.

In the Fall of 1886, a speaking tour was arranged by the SLP, bringing to the United States German Social Democratic leader Wilhelm Liebknecht , Karl Marx’s daughter Eleanor Marx Aveling, and her husband Edward Aveling. Liebknecht addressed crowds in German, while the Avelings spoke in English. They later published a brief account of their visit, including a description of the SLP with a prediction of its future development. This material is available here as a downloadable file.

An “Official Protocol” of the 5th National Convention was published in German along with the Platform and Constitution of the Party (in German and English) as “No. 1” of the “Socialistic Library” series, Jan. 1, 1886.

In November 1886, the New Haven, CT weekly *The Workmen’s Advocate*, edited by

**J.F. Busche, was adopted as an SLP publication, giving the organization its first official English language voice since loss of *The Socialist* in 1878.**

**[1885 National Platform of the Socialistic Labor Party of North America](#)**

**[1885 National Constitution of the Socialistic Labor Party of North America](#)**

## **6. “6th National Convention”—Buffalo, NY—Sept. 17 - 21, 1887**

The 6th National Convention of the SLP was attended by 37 delegates, representing 32 sections. The gathering addressed the relationship between the SLP and the International Working-Men’s Association, which was organized late in 1881 and consisted primarily of West Coast working men and farmers. The IWMA was anti-electoral, with the group stating that “if universal suffrage had been capable of emancipating the working people from the rule of the loafing class, it would have been taken away from them before now, and we have no faith in the ballot as a means of righting the wrongs under which the masses groan.” A program of unity between the SLP and the IWMA could not be achieved, however, and by the end of the 1880s the latter group had slipped into oblivion. The SLP remained deeply divided between Lassalleans (who believed in the efficacy of political action the need to concentrate on electoral politics first and foremost) and Marxists (who believed that electoral politics was futile and that successful organization must take place in the realm of the trade unions). The party press was similarly split, the English language organ *The Workmen’s Advocate* and the German *Der Sozialist* favoring electoral politics over trade union activity, while the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*, edited at this time by Alexander Jonas and Sergei Schevitsch, staunchly advocated a program almost exclusively concentrating upon trade union organization.

**[1887 – A stenographic record of the proceedings of the 6th Convention.](#)**

**[1887 – National Platform of the Socialistic Labor Party of North America.](#)**

## **September 1889 Recall.**

In September 1889, the bulk of the membership of Section New York, lead by the anti-electoral *New Yorker Volkszeitung* group, voted to recall the sitting political-action oriented National Executive Committee headed by National Secretary W.L. Rosenberg and to replace them with a new group of trade union-advocates. The deposed Rosenberg NEC refused to recognize the legality of the action of the Section New York and a party crisis resulted. The *Volkszeitung* group took over the party’s office and newspapers by means of a physical raid.

fn. Rudolph Katz: “With DeLeon Since ‘89” in *Daniel DeLeon: A Symposium*. (SLP, 1919), pp. 5-6.

While the “recalled” National Committee maintained the originally scheduled date for the 7th Convention of Wednesday, Oct. 2, 1889, the replacement National Committee delayed their “7th Convention” for 10 days, opening it on Oct. 12.

## **Due To A Faction Fight, Two Competing National Conventions Were Held In 1889**

**7A. "7th National Convention" [Regular—Rosenberg] -- Chicago, IL—October 2- XX, 1889**

**1889 – A stenographic record of the proceedings of the 7th (Regular) Convention.  
1889 – National Platform of the Socialistic Labor Party of North America.**

**7B. "7th National Convention" [Insurgent—Schevitsch] —Chicago, IL—October 12-XX, 1889**

### **Coming of Daniel DeLeon.**

In the fall of 1890, a young graduate of Columbia Law School and former New York organizer for the Nationalist Clubs movement named Daniel DeLeon joined the Socialist Labor Party. The erudite DeLeon was immediately welcomed into the party with open arms, his fluency in English and ability as a public speaker being valuable assests. DeLeon was sent on a national organizing tour for the SLP in 1891.

Beginning in 1890, the SLP began to attempt to conduct socialist organization within the ranks of the American Federation of Labor. They attempted to gain a delegate to the December 1890 convention of the AF of L, but were ultimately rejected after acrimonious debate.

In March 1891, the SLP entered into an agreement with the Socialistic Cooperative Publishing Association to produce a new party paper. *The Workmen's Advocate* was replaced by a new and larger weekly called *The People*. Lucien Sanial, former editor of *The Workmen's Advocate* became the first editor of the new paper.

In 1891, the SLP ran Daniel DeLeon for Governor of New York. DeLeon received 13,000 votes. DeLeon was also named as Associate Editor of *The People*. He took over the top position at that paper when Editor Lucien Sanial resigned in 1892.

In 1892, the SLP ran candidates for President and Vice President of the United States for the first time. Simon Wing of Massachusetts and Charles H. Matchett of New York were the nominees for these two respective offices.

**8. "8th National Convention," Chicago, IL ----- July XX-XX, 1893**

The immigrant nature of the SLP is emphasized by the fact that the documents of the 1893 National Convention were written primarily in German.

The SLP achieved its greatest influence in the organized labor movement from 1893

to 1895. At the 1893 Convention of the AF of L, Thomas J. Morgan, an SLP member from Chicago and Secretary of the Machinists' Union, successfully presented a resolution calling for the government to provide work "when the private employer cannot or will not." Another resolution calling for "collective ownership by the people of all means of production and distribution" passed at that gathering by a vote of 2244 to 67.

At the 1894 Convention of the AF of L, Samuel Gompers was removed as head of the federation, being replaced by John McBride of the Miners Union. Although not a Socialist, the removal of Gompers was regarded as a coup by the SLP. Gompers regained his position at the next national convention of the AF of L, however, and was never seriously challenged for his position again.

In February 1896, Daniel DeLeon gave a lecture in Boston entitled "Reform or Revolution" in which ameliorative reforms were rejected decisively. Workers were exhorted to support explicitly revolutionary trade unions en route to a transformative seizure of state power. The Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance (ST&LA) was established as the vehicle for this movement—a set of "dual" trade unions in practical opposition to the established American Federation of Labor unions. An enormous conflagration erupted over this question, pitting adherents of the previously existing unions against supporters of the new ultra-left wing party line.

"The STLA was an active and militant labor organization, but it suffered from a schizophrenia that was to affect the Industrial Workers of the World later: Officially, it did not believe that workers could gain any real benefits under capitalism and would do best by putting their energies into establishing socialism, but simultaneously the union *had* to fight for immediate gains with weapons at its disposal such as the strike. Many workers who joined the STLA lacked the long view of the SLP members and concluded that the more established AFL, even with its evident shortcomings, gave more promise of immediate benefits." (fn. Girard and Perry, *The Socialist Labor Party, 1876-1991: A Short History*, pg. 21).

## **1893 – Proceedings of the 8th National Convention of the Socialist Labor Party.**

### **9. "9th National Convention," New York City ----- July 4 - 10, 1896**

The 1896 Convention of the SLP was attended by 94 delegates, representing sections in 12 states.

This gathering marked formal turn of the organization' from the tactic of "boring within" the existing "conservative" unions in favor of one of establishing explicitly "socialist" unions in opposition to the existing labor organizations. These dual unions were to be grouped under the umbrella of the "Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance" (ST&LA), an affiliated arm of the SLP.

The turn was formalized after heated debate of a resolution introduced to the convention by Daniel DeLeon . DeLeon's resolution stated that the AF of L and Knights of Labor had both "fallen hopelessly into the hands of dishonest and



ignorant leaders” and lauded the formation of the Socialist Trade & Labor Alliance, calling for the American proletariat to form “one irresistible class-conscious army, equipped both the shield of the economic organization and the sword of the Socialist Labor Party ballot.” DeLeon’s resolution passed by a vote of 71 to 6, with one abstention.

### **1896 – Proceedings of the 9th National Convention of the Socialist Labor Party.**

**Due To A Faction Fight, Two Competing National Conventions Were Held In 1900.**

**10A. “10th National Convention” [Insurgent—“Kangaroo”] —Rochester, NY—Jan. 27 - Feb. 2, 1900**

The anti-DeLeonist SLP Right held its own convention in Rochester, NY, proclaiming it the official “10th National Convention” of the Socialist Labor Party. The gathering enacted a resolution calling for unity with the Social Democratic Party and named a Unity Committee, headed by Morris Hillquit, to attend the forthcoming convention of the SDP and to there make a unity appeal.

Henry L. Slobodin was elected Executive Secretary of the SLP Right’s organization, which also called itself the “Socialist Labor Party” and issued an English language newspaper calling itself *The People*.

In addition to the New York group centered around the German-language newspaper the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*, the SLP Right had another center in the city of Chicago around an English language newspaper called *The Workers Call*, edited by A.M. Simons. This group initially attempted to circumvent the New York NEC of the SLP and to declare itself and its organ the official center of the organization in light of the interparty emergency that erupted in the Summer of 1899. Section Chicago was suspended by the New York NEC, however, and gradually moved to a position of unity with the largely German New York SLP Right oppositionists. Simons was later made editor of the Chicago-based theoretical journal *The International Socialist Review*, serving in that capacity from the publication’s foundation in 1900 through 1907.

In the course of preparation for organizational merger, the SLP Right’s organization voted to adopt the name “Social Democratic Party” and went under that moniker, with organizational headquarters in Springfield, Massachusetts, up to the time of the 1901 Unity Convention that established the Socialist Party of America.

**10B. “10th National Convention” [Regular—“DeLeonist”] —New York City—June 2 - 8, 1900**

The 10th National Convention of the SLP was a landmark gathering, the first since the formal split of the party. The SLP Right, associated with the *New Yorker*

*Volkszeitung* and a number of the anglophonic leaders who favored working within the existing AF of L trade unions rather than establishing dual “Socialist” unions, attempted to wrest control of the SLP organization and its central publication, *The People*, edited by Daniel DeLeon. This SLP Right faction (perjoratively known as the “Kangaroos”) held its own so-called “Tenth National Convention” in Rochester, NY, Jan. 27 to Feb. 2, 1900 before joining with the Social Democratic Party at the Indianapolis Unity Convention of 1901 to found the Socialist Party of America.

National Secretary Henry Kuhn’s extensive [Report of the National Executive Committee](#) to the 10th National Convention, detailing the intraparty strife and the status of the organization is available here as a downloadable document.

The 10th National Convention made extensive changes to the formal organizational form of the Socialist Labor Party and approved a substantial number of modifications to the national constitution. A document examining the [1896 and 1900 variants of the SLP constitution](#) is available as a downloadable document.

[Proceedings of the 10th National Convention of the SLP](#)  
A new [National Platform](#) approved as well.

#### 11. “11th National Convention”—New York City—July XX-XX, 1904

[National Platform was approved at the 11th National Convention of the SLP.](#)

For financial reasons, no stenographic record of the proceedings of the 11th Convention of the SLP was published.

#### 12. “12th National Convention”—New York City—July XX-XX, 1908

[National Platform was approved at the 12th National Convention of the SLP.](#)

For financial reasons, no stenographic record of the proceedings of the 12th Convention of the SLP was published.

#### 13. “13th National Convention”—New York City—April XX-XX, 1912



**For financial reasons, no stenographic record of the proceedings of the 13th Convention of the SLP was published.**

**14. “14th National Convention”—New York City—April XX-May XX, 1916**

**For financial reasons, no stenographic record of the proceedings of the 14th Convention of the SLP was published.**

**15. “15th National Convention”—New York City—May XX-XX, 1920**

**Some [3100 copies of a 64 page pamphlet](#) of the proceedings of the 15th Convention of the SLP was published.**

**The [National Platform approved by the 15th National Convention of the SLP](#)**

**At different times in 1921, the Socialist Labor Party sent Adolf Carm and NEC member John D. Goerke to Moscow as the party’s representative to the Third International. The SLP was not committed to joining the organization, but rather saw itself as the logical American representative of the revolutionary socialist program in America and sought to explain its specific views to the Comintern and return with the Comintern’s specific views for the consideration of the SLP. At no point in his 26 page letter to Lenin of Jan. 15 did National Secretary Arnold Petersen show a willingness to submit to the central discipline of the CI in the development of the SLP’s program and tactics.**

**16. “16th National Convention”—New York, NY—May 11 - 13, 1924**

**A complete stenographic record of the proceedings of the 16th Convention of the SLP was published in paperback book form.**

**The text of the various Language Federations of the SLP ([Bulgarian](#) // [Hungarian](#) // [Scandinavian \[Swedish\]](#) // [South Slavonic](#)) as well as the [Ukrainian Organizing Committee](#) are available as downloadable documents.**

**The [National Platform approved by the 16th National Convention of the SLP](#)**

**17. “17th National Convention”—New York, NY—May 12 - 14, 1928**

**A complete stenographic record of the proceedings of the 17h Convention of the SLP was published in paperback book form.**

**The [National Platform approved by the 17th National Convention of the SLP](#)**

**Here is a list of all the remaining Platforms published by the SLP for the years following the 17th National Convention:**

[1932](#)

[1944](#)

[1948](#)

[1952](#)

[1956](#)

[1960](#)

[1964](#)

[1968](#)

[1972](#)

[1976](#)

[1983](#)

[1999](#)

[2001](#)

[2005](#)